



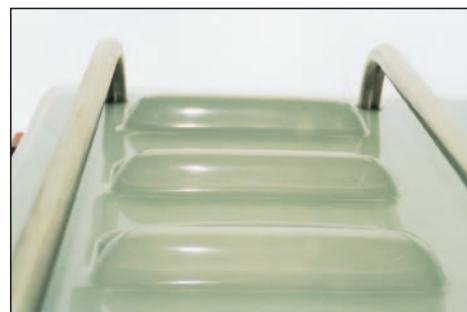
# MASTER CLASS?

## EVM System 460SL Platino on LWB Renault Master 2.8TD

*Jonathan Lloyd assesses a Renault Master-based Italian coachbuilt*

I was very keen to put Renault's Master chassis cab through its paces, so Timberland's kind invitation to borrow their EVM 460SL Platino demonstrator for a test was serendipity.

Undeniably this is a very striking motorhome. But how would it perform on a tough test during the coldest week of the year? Does it merit being referred to as 'master class'?



Ladder to roof rack consists of a set of moulded integral steps plus stainless steel handrails.



Platino is a very striking motorcaravan. Reversing camera, rear ladder, and roof rack are standard.

### Overview

Until last year's Peterborough show, the name EVM System was unknown to British motorcaravanners, and the firm is a relatively recent addition to the ranks of European motorhome builders.

Timberland, as a UK converter of panel vans, felt that the retail side of their operation needed a coachbuilt range, so they decided to become the sole importers for EVM.

### Systematic

EVM System actually refers to the way that the coachbuilt body is manufactured and fixed to the chassis cab. EVM's brochure says that, 'the pre-formed body is moulded in one piece from glass fibre'.

However, this particular body shell appeared to my (untrained and unqualified) eye not to have been moulded in one piece, but in several cells, which were subsequently joined together using glass mat and resin.

Whichever way it was actually fabricated,

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Good seating position, and all controls fell neatly to hand. Note monitor for reversing camera, and CD/radio with GPS navigation.



The rear of the 'van contains the 'comfort station'. Left door hides the loo, washbasin and cupboards - right door the shower compartment. The caravan door is in the left-hand corner.



Only two rear seatbelts, despite sleeping accommodation for seven, and rear seat lacks steel support.

it certainly looked very strong and durable, and should, hopefully, resist damp ingress. Most new coachbuilts look great on the forecourt; it's five or ten years later that good build quality really comes to the fore.

It seemed to me that a lot of the body shell's amazing rigidity must be attributed to the GRP cage-like inner subframe. EVM have produced a zinc-plated steel chassis to join the coachbuilt body floor to the chassis cab.

### Master

The old Master was a very worthy vehicle, but sadly underused by UK motorcaravan manufacturers. Renault's all-new Master, introduced a couple of years ago, promises to change the habits of a lifetime and it has already provoked a lot of interest.

At the time of writing, the supply of RHD chassis cabs is reported to be somewhat erratic, so Renault fans desiring a coachbuilt will have to look to foreign manufacturers to satisfy their addiction. Even in Europe, though, the choice of Master-based motorhomes is somewhat limited.

Motive power for our test 'van was a 2.8-litre four-cylinder direct-injection intercooled turbo unit (similar to that used in the Fiat Ducato), which moved the (fairly lofty) 460 along with real gusto. Perversely, Renault didn't use the Fiat gearbox and fascia gearchange (which even Luddites like me have



Looking forward we see the front dinettes. Importer Timberland had changed the upholstery, and fitted the practical (removable) carpets.

had to admit is one of the best in the business). Instead, they have used their own gearbox and floor shift. Changing gear was effortless, but the shift is less precise than the Fiat's. Also, finding neutral sometimes required a light touch. Ratios were well chosen, though.

The ride in the Renault was very civilised, not at all commercial, but still taut, with minimal roll on corners. I suspect much of that could be attributed to EVM's standard fitting of airbag assisters for the rear leaf springs. (These are assisters only and not 'air suspension'.)

The seating position was spot-on, and all the controls fell neatly to hand.

Standard equipment for EVM Masters includes a tachometer, four-speaker stereo multi-CD/radio, and GPS navigation. I couldn't use the GPS - there wasn't a British information disk supplied. Sad, because it did look as though it would provide compulsive button pushers and knob twiddlers (like me) with hours of endless fun, as well as being a useful aid to navigation.

Also standard was the rear-view camera, plus black and white dashboard-mounted monitor. Handy for crunch-free reversing most of the time, but not much help when the 'van had been down a motorway in the rain. Mucky spray completely obscured the camera lens.

Many chassis now specified for the motorhome market arrive with electrically-operated windows and electrically-adjustable exterior mirrors with demisting elements.

None of these graced this particular Renault. In addition, EVM haven't trimmed the cab seats to match the caravan, or added armrests. As a result, the cab did have rather a utilitarian feel to it.

At the moment, EVM motorcaravans are only available in left-hand drive but, according to the brochure, right-hand drive should be available to special order (at extra cost).

It was disconcerting to find that the headlamps still dipped to the right and that the speedometer read in kilometres per hour only (with not even a conversion chart to help the driver). My understanding of the relevant legislation is that the driver should be able to read the speed in mph, day and night, and all road lights must comply with UK law (including the headlamps and rear fog light). At least the fog light was on the correct side for us here in rain-sodden Blighty.

Over a good few hundred miles, the Renault proved itself to be a very worthy opponent to the omni-present Fiat Ducato. It represents warp factor improvement over the previous Master.

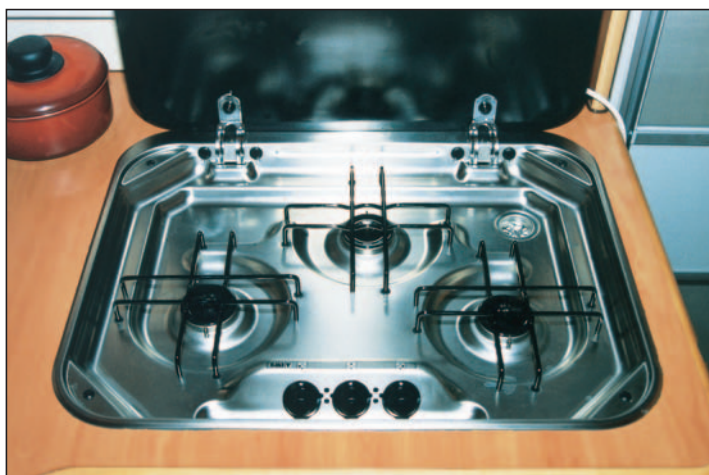
### Interior

The 6.9m long 460 offers plenty of scope for designers to provide accommodation for the larger family, or for a group of friends wishing to motorcaravan together.

The entrance door is towards the rear, on the UK offside. Enter, and immediately ahead are two single bunks. On the left is the



L-shaped kitchen consists of three-burner hob, sink and large compressor fridge. High-level oven is out of picture.



Hob looked stylish, but saucepan supports were too small. There was nowhere to park pans, and it was too easy to knock them over.



Rear bunks were comfortable. Top bunk is fixed but lower hinges upwards to create large stowage with exterior access.

washroom and completely separate shower compartment, and on the right is the kitchen. Forward of the bunks is a single Pullman dinette. A double Pullman dinette is forward of the kitchen. The overcab area houses a fixed double bed.

**Lounging**

If preferred, the single dinette can be converted into an inward-facing settee. Halogen downlighters provided the illumination at night. During the daylight hours, two top-hung windows plus Heki panoramic rooflight facilitated both illumination and ventilation. There didn't seem to be any dedicated secure storage for the two dining tables.

Heating is by a Truma Combi 6000 gas-fired space and water heater. Space heating is by blown-air only. Or, as in the case of my test, not - during my first night away it kept switching off. Just what you need when the outside temperature is falling to minus nine degrees centigrade.

Furthermore, the automatic dump valve regularly dumped the contents of the hot water boiler. I can't help thinking that this might have been due to the (inappropriately supplied) butane gas ceasing to flow at such low temperatures, except that the hob and oven worked fine. The next day I went out and bought a 230V fan heater, and a large bottle of Scotch. Both functioned well!

All the dining seats were comfortable and, of course, the overcab and bunk beds were instantly available for daytime dozing.

The seat cushions have been covered in a multicoloured patterned fabric, which the importers judged to be more compatible with British purchasers' tastes than the original plain electric blue covers.



Double dinette converts into double bed. Seven cushions of varying thickness made the result rather lumpy.

**Catering**

The kitchen had some interesting new developments. The Vitfrigo 1200 compressor-type refrigerator worked on either 12V or 230V electricity. Not only is it big (110 litres), but it also has a full-width two-star freezer compartment.

The three-burner hob is from the latest Smev range. It looked very stylish, but was found to be (at best) impractical and (at worst)

dangerous. The problem, as I saw it, was that the saucepan supports were only around the burners, not over the whole top, so there was nowhere to rest pans away from the burners. In addition, the potential for tipping over saucepans is vastly increased. Perhaps that's why they have included a drain in the hob!

There was some worktop available, but its corner location made it a fair stretch away.

In essence, this was a typical Continental motorcaravan kitchen. It didn't have any dedicated storage for crockery and cutlery; neither did it feature a grill, or a draining surface next to the sink. There was a (very) high-level oven, plus the deepest low-level kitchen cupboard I've come across. I've been in apartments that are smaller!

**Land of nod**

I slept comfortably in all the fixed beds. Ladders (for the overcab double and upper bunk) and a safety net for the top bunk, were very shy - to the point of not putting in an appearance at all. Early attempts at transferring my bulk from the floor to a high-level bed were not suitable for viewing by those easily offended or of a nervous disposition!

The two dinettes made into double and single beds, leaving an access gangway in between. The single bed make up wasn't the best I've seen. The folding table leg didn't fold in the right place, and this gummed up the works. The table leg on the large table did fold in the right place, but the resulting double bed had too many cushions of differing thicknesses.

**Ablutions**

Italian motorcaravan manufacturers usually provide a good washroom in their 'vans. This

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Large fixed circular basin and bench-type cassette toilet feature in the other section of the bathroom.

one didn't - it actually provided two! Smartly finished in green and white, and comprehensively equipped, these were very much appreciated.

The door nearest to the bunks opened to reveal a shower cubicle, with GRP clad wipe-clean walls and a moulded shower tray.

The room next door was home to the vanity sink, cassette toilet, and storage cupboards. There was ample elbowroom, and plenty of natural and artificial light to aid precision cosmetic application, or non-injurious facial shaving.

This split room set-up is ideal for families with adolescent offspring. (Is it just me that can never spot any differences after they have spent hours on end titivating?) One can enjoy a private shower whilst someone else is washing or whatever. Only a small point, but I would have liked a sink plug!

## Standard extras

This list is quite amazing. Just tot up how much it would cost you to add these to rival manufacturers' motorcaravans and it makes you wonder how EVM do it.

I've already mentioned the airbag spring assisters, reversing camera and monitor, multi-change CD/radio, and GPS navigation system. Add to that a colour-coded front bumper; a flyscreen inner door (incomplete on the test vehicle); extractor fan; two solar panels; electric entrance step; fully-recessed electrically-operated roll-out four-metre awning; walk-on roof; roof rack and ladder; TV aerial and amplifier; Heki panoramic rooflight;

large access door to lower bunk storage; additional exterior-access locker; and awning light - to name but a few!

I was particularly pleased to see both



Underbunk store with exterior door. Underneath my bucket were dedicated storage compartments for the leisure battery and tools.



Shower cubicle is completely separate and has three recessed shelves.

smoke and carbon dioxide detectors, and a large fire extinguisher. They might well save someone's life.

## Bargain buy?

You get all that kit, plus the LWB Renault Master chassis with the 2.8TD engine option for £39 950. However, at the time of writing, Timberland's demonstrators were being discounted. For a 'van similar to the model featured, the price would be £34 950 (on the road).

## On reflection

In my humble opinion, the designers of the 460SL Platino have, on occasions, suffered from muddled thinking. For example, it has seven sleeping berths, but only four travel seats. And the wardrobe is not really big enough to take seven outdoor coats.

EVM emphasise the safety features of the Renault cab, but the rear travel seats provided had no metal frame for the seat back.

The entrance door has a secure anti-burst lock, but unfortunately the large exterior door to the underbunk storage area had very flimsy locks, and offered almost immediate access to the 'van for enterprising burglars.

A gas cylinder locker is provided as standard, but it has only a tiny vent in one side, and no drop-out vents in its floor.

Finally, you'll need strong pockets to carry all nine of the conversion keys. EVM have



More stowage space can be found in the offside skirt panel.



even managed to fit locks requiring different keys to the same locker door - Timberland have tried to address this problem by colour-coding all the keys and locks.

**Conclusion**

EVM have incorporated some new ideas and loads of wonderful goodies. I loved the new Master; it had no faults and much in its favour.

If you like the 460 SL Platino's layout (and we did), and yearn for a new Renault Master-based coachbuilt, go take a look.

Master class? Perhaps not! This motorcaravan is coming from the right direction, but it certainly needs a bit of tweaking to take it to the top of the form. □



**In brief**

**Base vehicle:** Renault Master long wheelbase chassis cab (left-hand drive)  
**Engine type:** 2.8-litre intercooled and turbocharged diesel  
**Output:** 115bhp @ 3600 rpm  
**Gearbox & drive:** Five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive  
**Make & model:** EVM System 460SL Platino  
**Body type & construction:** Cellular GRP overcab coachbuilt  
**Conversion NCC approved:** No  
**Electrical equipment:** 230V hook-up; consumer unit; 12V control unit; leisure battery charging; solar panels; 13-amp switched sockets  
**Lighting:** All 12V. Halogen downlighters, halogen reading lights, exterior awning light  
**Cooking facilities:** Three-burner hob, oven, and extractor fan  
**Refrigerator:** Vitfrigo 12V/230V compressor fridge, with full-width two-star freezer compartment, capacity 110 litres  
**Water heater and space heater:** Truma Combi 6000 water boiler and space heater, blown-air only heat distribution

**Fresh water tank:** 140 litres (30.8 gallons), inboard (heated)  
**Waste water tank:** 100 litres (22 gallons), underfloor (insulated)  
**Gas locker capacity:** Two 6/7kg cylinders  
**Rear restraints:** Two three-point seatbelts (see text)  
**Additional features:** Reversing camera and monitor; multi-change CD/radio; GPS navigation system; flyscreen inner door; two solar panels; electric entrance step; fully recessed electrically-operated roll-out four-metre awning; walk on roof; roof rack and ladder; colour coordinated front bumper; TV aerial and amplifier; Heki panoramic rooflight; extractor fan; large access door to lower bunk storage; further exterior access locker; heated roof; smoke detector; carbon dioxide detector; fire extinguisher

**Dimensions:**

**Overall Length:** 6.9m (22ft 8in)  
**Overall width:** 2.30m (7ft 6.5in) excluding mirrors  
**Overall height:** 2.95m (9ft 8.5in)

**Interior height:** 2.07m (6ft 9in)  
**Bed dimensions:**  
**Overcab:** 1.82m x 1.41m (6ft 0in x 4ft 7.5in);  
**front single:** 1.88m x 0.58m (6ft 2in x 1ft 11in);  
**front double:** 1.88m x 1.14m (6ft 2in x 3ft 9in);  
**bunks:** (two) 1.84m x 0.61m reducing to 0.49m (6ft 0.5in x 2ft 0in/1ft 7in)  
**Max authorised weight:** 3500kg  
**Load capacity:** 600kg

**Price**

**Standard model:** £39 950 (on the road)  
**As tested:** £34 950 (on the road - ex-demonstrator)  
**Optional extras:** None listed

*EVM System 460SL Platino kindly supplied for evaluation by: Timberland Motorhomes, Ponside, Wootton, N Lincs DN39 6SD. Tel: 01469 589321. Fax: 01469 589320. E-mail: timberlandmotorhomes@excite.com Web site: www.timberlandmotorhomes.com EVM web site: www.evmsystem.com*



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